

Fighting For a Birthright



Steven Yee Pui Chung

STEVEN YEE

Fighting For a Birthright

荷葉
SOON KUEH
\$4.00 / 100g



\$2.00
芋頭糕
加猪腸粉
YAM CAKE
+ WICHEL CHEONG FUN



\$1.00
炒米粉
FRIED BEE HOON



\$1.00
炒麵
FRIED NOODLE



\$3.50
綠豆粽
GREEN BEAN
RICE
DUMPLING



\$2.50
肉粽
PORK
RICE DUMPLING
\$3.50



\$2.50
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NONYA
RICE DUMPLING



\$3.00
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肉碎粥
CENTURY EGG
MINCED MEAT
PORRIDGE



\$3.00
花生魷魚粥
PEANUT CUTTIEFISH
PORRIDGE



\$3.00
雞絲粥
SHREDDED CHICKEN
PORRIDGE



\$4.50
海蜆
JELLYFISH



聯合晚報



\$7



DON & UDON

\$9

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海蜆
JELLYFISH
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Best One

EST. 1993



Fighting For a Birthright

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Fighting For a Birthright

Food is everything we are. It's an extension of nationalist feeling, ethnic feeling, your personal history, your province, your region, your tribe, your grandma. It's inseparable from those from the get-go. – Anthony Bourdain (Schulz, 2010)

Abstract

Every country has a street food legacy. All roads apparently lead to ancient Rome, Greece and China and began as cheap chow for the poor. Today it is fast food for people on the go. In Singapore, this heritage is a unique dining experience, quite unlike anywhere in the world. The genesis of the trade in the city-state originated in the 1800s, when hawkers served meals from pushcarts and wooden cabinets that they ferried from place to place.

By the mid-1900s, they were depended upon to feed a nation when it became the norm for married women to continue in their career ambitions. But as the way they conducted their trade posed a high risk of infectious disease spreading in the population, itinerant food vendors were relocated to purpose-built sheltered hawker centres from 1971. Over the succeeding decades these permanent facilities all over the country became not only destinations to have a meal but for family and social gatherings, and business meetings.

Generations of Singapore residents since then took it for granted that it is their birthright an inexpensive good and tasty meal is always close at hand any time, even 24 hours a day. This symbiotic relationship between the food hawker and patron took a huge blow when Covid-19 hit in early 2020 and in-dining forcibly came to a halt at hawker centres. The laughter and chatter of people, and clanging of food utensils of cooks and diners came to an eerie silence, like a frame from a dystopian movie.

These scenes came into focus in my lens as vendors at hawker centres struggled to stay afloat as Singapore waged a battle against the pandemic. Their eyes pined for familiar faces as a mother would for a hungry child to feed while in-diners were still prohibited in Phase 1 of reopening up the economy.

All through this trial, a country-wide movement on various social media platforms to support and save this national food institution went on with a passion. Come what may, Singaporeans, foodies who would drive hundreds of kilometres to Malaysia and fly thousands more across continents for the sake of their palates, were determined to preserve their culture at home.

樟宜村熟食
CHANGI VILLAGE COOKED FOOD

明地連亞冷熱飲品
Bendamear Cold & Hot Drinks

FORTUNE POPIAH
富城春卷 · 蝦米卷

新新豆府
SHEN SHEN BEAN CURRY

萬全飲料
WAN CHUAN BEVERAGE

萬全飲料
WAN CHUAN BEVERAGE







SSIE
LINGO!







Introduction

It dawned upon me a couple of years ago that I had to record images of Singapore hawker culture that may be lost in time because this country is changing constantly.

Junod (2014, p.168) mentioned “The photographer is no stranger to history; he knows it is something that happens later. In the actual moment history is made, it usually happens in terror and confusion”.

Modern Singapore was founded on the backs of migrants. They came from all corners of the world, chiefly from Asia, when Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles established a trading port in 1819. It was inevitable in a small island that over time their cultures fused, no more so than in everyday food. This literal melting pot inspired them to concoct new dishes from each other's ethnic food. The Chinese used ingredients from South and Southeast Asia to create their interpretation of curry and chilli recipes. In their turn, the Indians and Malays embraced, among others, the noodle, an East Asian staple, and gave it a spicy spin.

This gastronomical evolution eventually found its way into the alley ways of 19th century Singapore. With thousands of immigrants flowing into the colony in its nascent years, many turned to hawking cheap food to fill hungry stomachs. Over the subsequent decades and into the next century these vendors selling every variety of ethnic fare became ubiquitous.

The street, though, bred unsanitary conditions. In post-Independence Singapore, hawker centres were built from 1971 to house street food vendors in a clean environment under one roof. As married couples moved out of the kitchen and joined the workforce in droves in the latter half of the 20th century, it became official policy to build hawker centres in every town and residential district. This gave Singaporeans easy access to scores of vendors selling all types of inexpensive food. As a consequence, it entrenched in their psyche the culture of dining out for every meal.

From gentry to ordinary folk the hawker centre evolved into an indelible part of Singapore life. It is a community centre of sorts, connecting people of all veneer.

The high demand they created and the competition that came with it, produced quality food of the highest standards at the lowest levels that has been internationally recognised. In 2016, the Michelin Guide awarded a Singaporean hawker “the world's first (and cheapest) Michelin-starred street food” for his Hong Kong-style soya sauce chicken.

But this love affair with and almost complete dependence on the hawker to feed a country has consequences. Covid-19 made this point. When Circuit Breaker regulations were imposed to restrict the movement of people with social distancing and work-from-home, the nation was suddenly wrapped in a pall of gloom. There was concern on how it will hit the hawker trade and, if any, its lasting effects on a cultural institution.

Lockdowns called Circuit Breaker was put in place amidst confusion. When the virus hit, rendering these places like deserts, the picture of birds that refuse to take flight tell the entire story of a nation backed into a corner. The scenes could have come off the reels of Steven Soderbergh's *Contagion*, except this is real life in motion. Many businesses had to fold, and this affected many heritage food vendors, known as hawkers, in Singapore's iconic hawker centres.

Berger (2013, p.62) quoted

“A photograph arrests the flow of time in which the event photographed once existed”.

In modern, urban Singapore the hawker centre is a culture that has survived after two hundred years. Truly little has changed in terms of how they function. I started documenting them for posterity because many hawkers are getting on in age and in an era when they hardly have anyone who wants to take their places. Better occupations beckon their better educated children. Covid-19 was the trigger that pushed many of them into retirement.

Hence, shooting the fleeting moments at hawker centres – from Circuit Breaker to the easing of people movement rules and reopening of businesses – was an opportunity to go deeper into my work on Singapore.





01-01
炒 粿 條
FRIED KWAY TEOW
01-01

01-02
海南雞飯
Hainanese Chicken Rice

01-03
釀豆
Yong Tai



浆料没有卖

INGREDIENT NOT FOR SALE

SG CLEAN

五里香
NCE DESSERTS

(BEDOK)
勿洛
CHINATOWN BRANCH
水粿
02-43

牛車水油雞
Cow Car Water Soya Sauce Chicken
Sambal • Garlic • Soybean Paste

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SELF SERVICE

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MIN. 4PCS
1 SET \$0.30
BUSINESS HOURS
MON. TO 10PM

牛車水油雞

牛車水油雞





319



宵魚糜 TEOCHEW FISH PORRIDGE
01-14

潮興魚圓肉脞麵
01-15

女皇鎮甜品甘蔗汁
Queentown Dessert, Sugarcane Juices
01-16



IN

SafeEntry TraceTogether

TRACETOGETHER REQUIRED

For SafeEntry check-in

CHECK IN WITH THESE METHODS

Tapping your TraceTogether App or Token on the SafeEntry Gateway Device

Scanning the QR code using the TraceTogether App

Presenting QR code on TraceTogether Token to be scanned



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- You do not have any fever or other symptoms
- You agree to the terms and conditions of the service and use of your information for the purpose of COVID-19 contact tracing

More information: [SafeEntry](#) or [TraceTogether](#)





THIS WAY TO
COOKED FOOD
SECTION

熟食中心



Project Objectives

The reasons that drive photographers to capture images are many: from wanting to inform and amaze to inspire and document history. The latter motivates me. As a photographer, I believe that because of the frequent changes that occurs in Singapore, it is important to constantly document the country and its people. Barthes (1980) mentioned “Photography can lie as to the meaning of a thing but never to its existence”, and Sontag (1977) echoed a similar sentiment “What is true of photographs is true of the world seen photographically”.

While the written word offers vivid descriptions of people, places and culture, a picture, as the saying goes, paints a thousand words.

A photo of a Singapore street scene in the 1800s could transport an audience back to a time that is now no longer visible. This will be the case also for my work in 50 to 100 years’ time, and beyond. This is priceless for future generations. Compared to video images, photographs can also be hung on a wall and contemplated on.

I also want to start conversations among the audience on the topics I cover. I want to stimulate discussions on how this culture can and should be preserved. As a photographer, I hope that the emotive images which I produced can push my audience to start searching for them. It is an outlet that authorities can also tap into for valuable feedback on our food culture.

Carefully selecting the images, packaging, and presenting them to the public can help generate constructive conversations. It will also help me understand what technique I employ is effective and appeals to my audience, hence allow me to grow and improve my photographic work.

I want my work to have a meaningful impact, not only for those living in my time but also for others in the future.

新明日報

传 米其林一星油鸡饭老板

师承1女师傅 在同大厦开档

魏宋凌 报道

joleneg@sph.com.sg

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林成源 摄影

老板:我师承香港主厨



米其林一星油鸡饭红,有传指老板陈翰铭的女师傅近在咫尺,甚至也在牛车水大厦小贩中心开档!陈翰铭坦言,曾在对方的店内当煮炒头手,但油鸡师承香港主厨,并非女师傅。

本报连日报道,牛车水大厦小贩中心的“了凡香港油鸡饭面”

在7月摘下来其林一星荣衔,多家海内外企业表示有意与老板陈翰铭(51岁)合作,人气暴涨。

记者接获消息,指陈翰铭的师傅其实是熟食中心内的女摊贩萧佩英(玛丽亚,68岁),而她的摊位“玛丽亚处女鸡”与陈翰铭的摊位距离不到50米。

萧佩英受访时透露,她当时在新桥路开店,陈翰铭曾是自己的厨师。

“父亲在中国学习烹调油鸡的方法,并研发酱料秘方,而我在1989年开店卖油鸡、煮炒及点心等。不久后,我聘请陈翰

▲萧佩英称,自己将油鸡制作及秘方传授给陈翰铭。

铭担任油鸡厨师,也将准备油鸡的步骤、烹调方法及酱汁秘方传授给他,他工作了10多年。”

萧佩英说,她自己曾再研发油鸡酱汁,因此和早前传授给陈翰铭的不一样。

“陈翰铭非常勤劳,学东西很容易上手,我为他取得米其林一星的荣耀感到骄傲。”

记者联络上陈翰铭,他坦承在对方的店内工作过,不过自己的油鸡是向香港师傅拜师学的,酱汁则由他自己调制研发,并不是萧佩英所传授。

与澳门歌星结拜 名字当招牌

萧佩英表示,由于自己长得像当年澳门知名歌星玛丽亚,一次当玛丽亚光顾时,两人结拜成“姐妹”。

“随后她的店名加上‘玛丽亚’,而‘处女鸡’则是为了吸引顾客好奇,制造话题性。”

她表示,9岁开始在厨房工作,至今已59载,考虑两年退休。

“我年老双腿容易疼痛,若有人愿意花80万买我的油鸡秘方,我也能安心退休。有兴趣的人,我也愿意收徒弟教导。”

当时任煮炒厨师

陈翰铭表示,曾有其他人想和他摊位“搭”上关系,顾客都会上门问他们虚实。

“只要我没有亲耳听到,对方也不需用我们的招牌或名字,我都不介意。”

不过,他坦言,自己27年前的确在萧佩英的旧店当过厨师,但当时是煮炒师傅,根本没有烹饪油鸡。

没烹制油鸡

萧佩英则表示,她并不眼红,认为陈翰铭是“牛车水之光”。

“他能拿到殊荣,我替他高兴,他为牛车水小贩中心争光,我也不会眼红,也不希望得到米其林,我对我自己的生意情况非常满意。”











NO TOUTING
IN THIS
FOOD CENTRE
本食館中心
不可招徠

EXIT

Valueller
ABC

WE ARE
SING

Valueller
ABC

The Audience

I was advised to ease off from the Covid-19 theme and this prompted me to rebrand the hawker centre project as “Fighting for a Birthright”. This theme resonates with all Singaporeans and hawkers, who want to preserve this heritage that they own.

**Sontag (2003, p.89) said
“The image says: keep these events
in your memory”.**

This project that I have embarked on appeals primarily to Singaporeans as it documents a history they are intimately connected to. My secondary audience is the world at large, visitors to Singapore who have heard about our hawker centre culture – universally known as street food – through the Singapore Tourism Board’s international promotions.













Nasi Ayam Goreng

AYAM PENSET \$5.00
Ayam Penyet

Kulit Ayam
(Kampak Ayam / Kulit)
Longkeng
Leher Ayam (Kambing Soup)
Hati Ayam (Kambing Soup)
Mempedal (Kambing Soup)
Mix / \$4 / \$5

B

NO SMOKING

Scopas
Rider
Collection
point

KAMBING
Best & Famous Mutton Soup in Singapore
Kambing Yang Paling Sedap, Upper...

Ethics

In Photography, I always try to present the views in factual ways without the intention of causing unnecessary misunderstandings which might arise from any biased angles. With regards to the subject, I emphasised on the importance of not affecting and disturbing the hawkers and the customers during the photography shoot.

Singapore has a strict Personal Data Protection Act which prevents photographers from harassing the subjects. With differences in the cultural perspectives between the East and West, Singaporeans are generally camera shy. Some do not like to be photographed; hence I respect their wish, less my work raise any unusual copyright or legal issues.







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New Hope

After months of forced desertion, they are back at their top haunts, but cautiously. The men and women working tediously in their stalls breathed a sigh of relief. Once again, they are able to see the joy of their patrons partaking the food they've prepared.

The life of hawkers, when they awake to prepare food while the country is still fast asleep, then toil away throughout the day to feed Singaporeans and until it is time to call it day is one such topic. A feature could be conducted on a hawker about his life and work.

I strive to continue to photograph the food derived from the four races in Singapore. The many ethnic foods available, the select few who have decided to take over their parents' food stalls and yet a younger, new generation serving non-traditional fare are other angles, hence featuring the past, present and the future. So, too, the people who benefit from them and take for granted hawker food is their birth right is another.

Training initiatives provided by the recently formed Hawker Training school has brought hope to the future of Hawkers. Many Singaporeans who have no experience in this trade are eligible to take up courses in the school. They are taught how to cook a variety of food from the different ethnic groups.

Before they set off on their new found trade, they practiced their skills at the training school's hawker centre. Such training helps to manage their expectation as a new Hawker, to provide them with the courage to manage their future business, or to give up the idea of being a Hawker if they find this job too tough.



69

: BOON KENG ROAD :

Project Dignity

Probably

THE FIRST HAWKER TRAINING CENTER
IN THE WORLD

也许是世界上第一家小贩培训中心

to build & return dignity

以热忱工作

to the disabled
&
disadvantaged

让弱势和残障人士

through vocation with passion

建立和重拾尊严



Sweet Rice Cakes (Mochi)

Ingredients:	200g	Sweet Rice Flour
Water	100g	Water
Coconut Oil	10g	Coconut Oil
Salt	1g	Salt

Preparation:

1. Boil water in a pot and add rice flour. Stir with a wooden spoon until it forms a thick paste. Add water and coconut oil. Stir until it is smooth. Add salt. Stir until it is smooth.

2. Roll the paste into a ball. Flatten it. Roll it out. Cut it into pieces. Fry it in a pan. Fry it until it is golden brown. Fry it until it is crispy. Fry it until it is crunchy. Fry it until it is delicious.

MAINTAIN QUALITY CONTROL PROCEDURES
8 & 9/7/21 Jspn-5
thspn-15 永言行利

TRAINER: MR ERIC CHIDM

CE1: Follow Quality Control Procedures

CE2: Follow F&B Hygiene & Safety Guidelines

Follow Portion Control Guidelines

Maintain Quality Control of Food Products

Demonstrate Plating/ Presenting Food.





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